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THE CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS AT THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London have had a pleasant intercourse for a number of years in reference to their educational work and problems. Miss E. M. Spiller, Honorable Secretary of the Art

before 11 o'clock in the morning. Boys and girls troop in with a business-like air; they greet one another as old friends and reminders pass round that clean hands and faces are desirable. Soon a few well-recognized grown-up friends arrive and hearty handshaking and greetings ensue. "Good morning, George, you really have grown this time, how are the others?" "Thank you, miss, Jessie and Jimmy are coming



MADONNA AND CHILD
BY ALBERT VAN OUWATER

Teachers' Guild, has more than once entertained members of the Museum staff with a recital of the profitable way in which the Christmas holidays are spent by some children in London. At our request she has written such an account for this BULLETIN.

WHEN the Christmas holidays begin there is a good deal of bustle in the Entrance Hall of the Museum some minutes

along presently, but I don't think Ernie will be here this morning." "Well, any prizes this year?" "Not me, miss, but Ernie and Jimmy have both got prizes." Six-year-old Jimmy arrives, beaming of countenance.—"Hello, Jimmy, I've just heard that you won a prize at school; what was it for?" "Punckchality and reg'lar 'tendence, miss." "That's right; I expect you've been a good boy too, only I think your mother ought to have the prize if she

sends you off early every morning: you tell her so.—Now then, are you all ready to come and look at some of the things put out in a new gallery? We will just wait till 11 o'clock before starting."—These are the "initiated."

Whir—r—r—r, round goes the revolving door three or four times and finally a gang of a dozen grubby urchins emerges helter-skelter, dragging in a few babies and little girls with them. "One at a time, boys," calls out the doorkeeper, as the youngsters try to push and scramble through the turnstile all at once. By the time all are through, the pinafores friend greets them:—"Good morning, boys, I am glad you've turned up just now as we are off to see some fine swords and things in the Museum. Just run and wash your hands and faces; here, George, show them the way. And what a jolly baby you've brought: Grace, come along and see how splendid you can make him look and his little sister too, when their rosy cheeks are quite clean."—These are the "uninitiated."

And now for the "super-initiated." When the bustle and turmoil is ended and all have wended their way to selected galleries, three tiny little girls appear. The youngest baby is picked up and carried down the steps by the eldest. Middle one asks baby, "What are you going to do?" "Drawlin'," answers baby with a look of extreme delight. "What are you going to draw?" "Paper!!!" cries out baby with another look of rapture and waving her arms. A stump of pencil is produced and with further murmurs of "Drawlin' paper" they go on their way to satisfy their hearts' desire. There are other little parties of bigger boys and girls who bring their own drawing kit and are encouraged and helped with a word of explanation or counsel.

But to follow the great group to the selected gallery, the place of which has been indicated to the doorkeepers, so that late comers may join the party. The organizing friend leads the way; three or four pinafores elder schoolgirls of fifteen or sixteen follow up with strawboards, paper, and pencils, the boys and girls chattering hard, exclaiming every now and then at some object which takes their fancy. The

first lesson on pointing at the objects in the glass cases has to be driven home,—fingernails and not finger-tips are to be used, so that no smears are seen on the glass.

It is before Christmas and there will be time to make a Christmas or New Year's greeting card, after looking at the beautiful illuminated manuscripts. After a few minutes' talk in which the children join, the company separates into small groups. It appears that a lantern lecture was given last term on illuminated manuscripts at one of the boys' schools, therefore these boys are the heroes of the morning and with but very little help are able to tell much that is interesting. Then initial letters are chosen to be copied or adapted and cards are distributed upon which to design the words of greeting. The party has grown in size. Picture-books have been fetched for the babies' delight. They squat on the floor in out-of-the-way nooks with a junior helper to turn over the leaves and tell the stories.

It is now about noon when a series of special lecture tours are given for children simultaneously with those for adults. Some of the elder children are invited to go around. The Christmas Story, Saint George, Japanese Armor, Furniture of Olden Time, and Tapestries are among the favorite subjects. The young people are encouraged to look for themselves, to compare, and to ask questions. The matter of money cost is hardly ever referred to by the children and never by the lecturer, but the value of good and suitable work is reiterated time after time. This part of the scheme had its comic side, for a girl of about thirteen was found inveigling others to go round the Museum under her guidance. The plan might have worked well, only the guide in this case proved to be somewhat mentally deficient and it ended in the "guided" fleeing from their guide.

The luncheon hour recess from 1 to 2 o'clock gives a period of rest to the helpers, who have the use of a private room and can make refreshing hot tea or coffee while the afternoon programme is discussed, the drawings and work criticized, and timely suggestions given to the junior helpers. These latter have the opportunity of

joining the public party on their round with the official guide, a privilege which is greatly enjoyed. A second guiding-tour with the children is given at 3 o'clock and the day ends at four, so that the children can get home to tea before it is dark, although some linger till the closing hour of 5 o'clock, but are left to their own resources.

The activities are greatly increased after Christmas Day. The long class-room of the Textile Department is thronged with girls and boys over nine years of age who gather round the tables and are busy choosing colors from among the heaps of wool. They proceed either to some form of decorative stitchery, or to weave on home-made looms, while the "initiated" are shown the mysteries of carpet knotting and weaving on a professional loom. On other days linoleum and stencil cutting and printing are in progress: again home-made tools are in evidence—old umbrella ribs sharpened and used as cutters. The illustration below represents a print made from one of these designs. The Textile Department staff, notably Messrs. Linstead and Martin, make things easy for the workers and help in demonstrating, while Miss Keay, Headmistress of the Derby Municipal Secondary Girls' School, and Miss Gillespy, a well-known London art-teacher and craftswoman, are responsible

for guiding the work with assistants and junior helpers. In carrying on the handicrafts, the holiday spirit is always uppermost.

At the end of the holidays, which comes all too soon, some examples of the handicrafts and drawings are arranged in a case, to the great joy of the young craftsmen and craftswomen, whose admiring families, relations, and friends are introduced to the Museum for the first time in order to see Tommy's or Rosie's specimens of work.

It will be readily noted that the relation with the children is perfectly informal, their confidence is gained at once, and the helpers are known as friends. It comes thus as a matter of course that the joy of work is realized and not its drudgery. The young folk seeing fine examples are instinctively moved to respect for and admiration of good work, which is largely the aim of the promoters of the Holiday Session.¹ From the helpers' point of view one feels that the work, like mercy, "is twice blessed: it blesseth him that gives, and him that takes."

ETHEL M. SPILLER.

¹This holiday session is organized as an activity of the Art Teachers' Guild, whose members are mainly concerned in secondary school and training college art teaching, while the whole Museum staff, from the Director to the cleaners, render the greatest possible assistance and encouragement.

